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NSC FOR JBRENNAN AND JDUNCAN; STATE FOR S/WCI

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TAGS: PREL, PTER, KWBG, SA, AF, IN, PK, IR, IZ
SUBJECT: COUNTERTERRORISM ADVISER BRENNAN'S MEETING WITH
SAUDI KING ABDULLAH

REF: RIYADH 427

Classified By: Pol Counselor Lisa Carle, 1.4(b),(d)

1. KEY POINTS

-- (S) Saudi King Abdullah welcomed White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan, S/WCI Ambassador Williamson, and Ambassador Fraker to his private palace March 15 for a 90-minute discussion focused on U.S. Saudi-relations, counterterrorism cooperation, the Yemeni Guantanamo Bay detainees, Iran, and Iraq.

-- (S) Brennan presented the King with a letter from President Obama expressing a personal message of friendship, appreciation for our close and collaborative relationship and concern over the disposition of Yemeni detainees at Guantanamo.

-- (S) The King said he had told Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki only minutes before that Iran should stop

interfering in Arab affairs, and had given Iran a one-year deadline to improve its relations with Saudi Arabia.

-- (S) The King expressed a complete lack of trust in Iraqi PM al-Maliki and held out little hope for improved Saudi/Iraqi relations as long as al-Maliki remains in office.

-- (S) When asked what advice he had for President Obama, the King said he had "one request": that it was "critically important to restore America's credibility" in the world.

U.S. SAUDI RELATIONS

2. (S) PLEDGES OF FRIENDSHIP: Brennan asserted that the U.S./Saudi alliance must remain strong, and assured the King of President Obama's wishes for a long and healthy U.S./Saudi relationship, and the President's personal commitment that Saudi Arabia had a friend in the White House. The King replied that he appreciated the sentiments and that he had great respect for President Obama. "We (the U.S. and Saudi Arabia) spilled blood together" in Kuwait and Iraq, the King continued, and Saudi Arabia valued this tremendously. Friendship can be a difficult issue that requires work, Abdullah said, but the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have done it for 70 years over three generations. "Our disagreements don't cut to the bone," he stated.

3. (S) U.S. CREDIBILITY IS CRITICAL: The Bush Administration is now in the past, the King said. Both President Bushes were his friends, but the recent President Bush didn't take his advice on dealing with issues in the region, and they found their problems "compounded." The King said, "we are ready to consult, provide guidance and to do whatever is necessary. We are people of the region and we know it well." Brennan responded that President Obama wants to listen, and asked what advice the King would offer to President Obama. Abdullah said his one piece of advice was that restoring U.S. credibility in the world was critically important. Brennan responded that this was an important issue for President Obama as well. Brennan said that under President Obama we will restore our credibility. He said the U.S. is a great country and we know what we have to do.

4. (S) THE WORLD NEEDS OBAMA: Brennan said President Obama looked forward to seeing the King at the G-20 summit in London. "Thank God for bringing Obama to the presidency," the King answered, which has created "great hope" in the Muslim world. "May God grant him strength and patience, Abdullah continued, "May God protect him. I'm concerned about his personal safety. America and the world need such a president."

5. (C) THAT WITHOUT WHICH NO SAUDI MEETING IS COMPLETE: Abdullah said "as a friend" that "it was a mistake" to limit access of Saudi citizens to the U.S., since "this damages bilateral relations and the image of the U.S. in Saudi

Arabia." The King noted there were 60,000 Saudi students abroad, about one third of whom were in the U.S., and "others would have gone" but for the difficulties in gaining access to the U.S. The King noted that for many years very senior Saudi officials, including Prince Saud al-Faisal, had studied in the U.S. He then noted that Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., Adel al Jubeir (who was interpreting for the King) had studied in the U.S. and was "half American" as a result. He also said he was aware of, and appreciated, Ambassador Fraker's efforts to improve the visa situation "even though there were people in Washington who fought him." Finally, he observed that anyone from Saudi Arabia who studies in the U.S. inevitably becomes a friend and advocate of the United States and that we only hurt ourselves by cutting off this flow of students.

DETAINEES

6. (S) GUANTANAMO WILL BE CLOSED: Brennan explained that President Obama had made a commitment to close Guantanamo to eliminate the potential propaganda benefits its existence provided to Al-Qaeda, but also because it was the right thing to do. Brennan reassured the King, however, that President Obama would remain strong on counterterrorism. Brennan presented the King with a letter from President Obama addressing the issue of Yemeni detainees at Guantanamo. Brennan noted that he had met with Prince Mohammed bin Nayef (MbN) the day before to discuss at length the issue of the Yemeni detainees. Brennan further stated that he would be traveling to Sanaa the next day to meet with President Saleh, as the issue of the remaining 99 Yemeni detainees still needed to be resolved. Brennan praised MbN as an outstanding counterterrorism partner, and that the MOI was doing a wonderful, courageous job in countering the terrorist threat to the Kingdom. Returning to the subject later in the conversation, Brennan warned that the U.S. feared Yemen could become another Waziristan, and urged that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia needed to work together to keep Al-Qaeda in Yemen from growing even more dangerous. The King replied that having Somalia next door to Yemen only adds to the danger. Brennan said that the capabilities of the Ministry of the Interior security forces had grown impressively over the past 10 years. Brennan added that counterterrorism and intelligence sharing cooperation between our countries had never been better and that MbN deserved the credit. In an unusual concession, made at the conclusion of their conversation, the King said, "be assured I am fully briefed on the work you are doing with Prince Mohammed bin Nayef."

7. (S) HOW TO TRACK DETAINEES: "I've just thought of something," the King added, and proposed implanting detainees with an electronic chip containing information about them and allowing their movements to be tracked with Bluetooth. This was done with horses and falcons, the King said. Brennan replied, "horses don't have good lawyers," and that such a proposal would face legal hurdles in the U.S., but agreed that keeping track of detainees was an

extremely important issue that he would review with appropriate officials when he returned to the United States.

IRAN

8. (S) A "HEATED EXCHANGE": The King noted that Iranian FM Mottaki had been "sitting in that same seat (as Brennan) a few moments ago." The King described his conversation with FM Mottaki as "a heated exchange, frankly discussing Iran's interference in Arab affairs." When challenged by the King on Iranian meddling in Hamas affairs, Mottaki apparently protested that "these are Muslims." "No, Arabs" countered the King, "You as Persians have no business meddling in Arab matters." The King said the Iranians wanted to improve relations and that he responded by giving Mottaki an ultimatum. "I will give you one year" (to improve ties), "after that, it will be the end."

9. (S) "SPARE US YOUR EVIL": The King expressed hope the U.S. would review its Iran policy and "come to the right conclusion." Brennan responded that President Obama was personally reviewing U.S. Iran policy and wanted to hear the King's thoughts. Abdullah asserted that Iran is trying to set up Hizballah-like organizations in African countries, observing that the Iranians don't think they are doing anything wrong and don't recognize their mistakes. "I said (to Mottaki) that's your problem," recounted the King. Abdullah said he would favor Rafsanjani in an Iranian election, were he to run. He described Iran not as "a neighbor one wants to see," but as "a neighbor one wants to avoid." He said the Iranians "launch missiles with the hope of putting fear in people and the world." A solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict would be a great achievement, the King said, but Iran would find other ways to cause trouble. "Iran's goal is to cause problems," he continued, "There is no doubt something unstable about them." He described Iran as "adventurous in the negative sense," and declared "May God prevent us from falling victim to their evil." Mottaki had tendered an invitation to visit Iran, but Abdullah said he replied "All I want is for you to spare us your evil." Summarizing his history with Iran, Abdullah concluded: "We have had correct relations over the years, but the bottom line is that they cannot be trusted."

10. (S) AN EMPTY CHANNEL: The King said "three years ago" Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei had sent his adviser Ali Akbar Velayati with a letter asking for Abdullah's agreement to establish a formal back channel for communication between the two leaders. Abdullah said he had agreed, and the channel was established with Velayati and Saudi FM Saud al-Faisal as the points of contact. In the years since, the King noted, the channel had never been used.

11. (S) A DANGEROUS NEIGHBORHOOD: Brennan responded that the Saudis lived in a dangerous neighborhood with Iran across the Gulf, with Saudi Arabia sharing a long border with Yemen,

and with a number of other troublesome countries nearby. Brennan noted that we have a lot of work to do in the Middle East together. The King responded that the world's attention was focused on the region. He further stated that he believed that the U.S. could help in this sensitive region, but that we should not take matters lightly. Brennan noted that President Obama is fully aware of the dangers in the region, that the U.S. knew that it had to remain involved in constructing a solution, and that we would seek the King's counsel in dealing with the many issues in the Middle East. The King asked if that included Iran. Brennan responded that it did. Brennan said that we had our eyes wide open to Iranian ambitions, that we were not naive to the dangers Iran posed to Saudi Arabia, and that Iran could not be allowed to succeed in its destabilizing activities. Brennan observed that the President had ordered a complete review of U.S. Iran policy and made reference to a passage in the President's letter that we needed to test Iran's intentions to cease its destabilizing behavior and live up to its international obligations. Brennan further observed that the U.S.-Saudi partnership had to remain strong and that together, and with others, we needed to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions. "That is important," responded the King. Finally, Brennan said the President wanted the King to know he had a good friend in the White House who would be willing to assist in any way that he could. The King thanked Mr. Brennan, said he appreciated the sentiments, said that he had great respect for President Obama, and reflected that we had been great friends for many years and would remain friends as our disagreements were minor.

12. (U) SEE REFTEL: Ref A provided a separate readout on the Iran discussion and the King's meeting with Mottaki.

IRAQ

13. (S) IN THE HANDS OF GOD AND IRAN: Brennan expressed the importance the U.S. attaches to achieving peace and stability in Iraq. The King replied that this was "in the hands of God," though he agreed that Iraq was vitally important to both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The King also pointed out that "some say the U.S. invasion handed Iraq to Iran on a silver platter; this after we fought Saddam Hussein."

14. (S) NO HOPE FOR MALIKI: The King said he had "no confidence whatsoever in (Iraqi PM) Maliki, and the Ambassador (Fraker) is well aware of my views." The King affirmed that he had refused former President Bush's entreaties that he meet with Maliki. The King said he had met Maliki early in Maliki's term of office, and the Iraqi had given him a written list of commitments for reconciliation in Iraq, but had failed to follow through on any of them. For this reason, the King said, Maliki had no credibility. "I don't trust this man," the King stated, "He's an Iranian agent." The King said he had told both Bush and former Vice president Cheney "how can I meet with someone I don't trust?" Maliki has "opened the door for Iranian

influence in Iraq" since taking power, the King said, and he was "not hopeful at all" for Maliki, "or I would have met with him."

AN ALERT AND ENGAGING HOST

15. (S) I MISS MY HORSES: The King appeared alert and at times animated, entertaining his guests with anecdotes about his encounters with Iranian leaders (septel), and throwing up his hands in complaint when asked if he spent time with his horses: "I see them on television when they race," he said. "I love horses," he exclaimed, "every couple of weeks I get to see them, and then I have a very calm and restful sleep."

16. (S) DIALOGUE AND REFORM AS DUTY: In response to Brennan,s praise for the King,s interfaith dialogue initiative, his commitment to advancing rights as reflected by his recent appointment of the first female (deputy education) minister, the King said "Thanks for the sentiment but I did nothing special, only what I thought was my duty. I believe we do our duty as determined by God."

17. (S) PARTICIPANTS:

Saudi Arabia

- Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud
- HRH Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, Assistant Minister of the Interior
- Ambassador to the U.S. Adel al-Jubeir (interpreter)

U.S.

- John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism
- Ambassador Ford Fraker
- Ambassador-at-large for War Crimes Issues Clint Williamson
- John Duncan, NSC Director for Counterterrorism
- Shaun Coughlin, Special Assistant, S/WCI
- Embassy control officer/notetaker

18. (U) Assistant to the President Brennan cleared this cable.

FRAKER

=====CABLE ENDS=====